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L E T T E R

FROM

E A R L S T A N H O P E ,

TO THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE

EDMUND BURKE:

CONTAINING A SHORT

ANSWER to his late SPEECH

ON THE

FRENCH REVOLUTION.

SECOND EDITION.

LONDON:

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LETTER

FROM

TO

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L E T T E R

FROM

E A R L S T A N H O P E,

TO THE

R I G H T H O N O U R A B L E

E D M U N D B U R K E.

MANSFIELD STREET, Feb. 24, 1790.

S I R,

IT was with regret, and with no small degree of surprize, that I read, yesterday, a Pamphlet purporting to be the substance of your *Speech* in the House of Commons, on Tuesday the Ninth instant, in which it is stated to be of consequence to you not to be *misunderstood*. I should have been still more astonished at that most extraordinary Production,

B

had

X This Speech is not

had I not had former opportunities of observing the curious tenets of your Political Creed.

You say that “*the French have made
 “ their way through the destruction of
 “ their Country, to a bad Constitution,
 “ when they were *absolutely in possession*
 “ of a good one !” And the precise time
 that you fix for the happy period of
 this GOOD *Constitution* was “ the day
 “ the States met in separate Orders.”
 You know, Sir, that at *that time*, the
 Bastile existed, the practice of Arbitrary
 Imprisonment existed, no *Habeas Corpus*
 was then established, no Trial by Jury was
 then known in that Country, nor had it
 even been moved for in the National
 Assembly ; there was then no *Declara-*
tion of Rights, no Liberty of the Press ;

* See page 17 of Mr. Burke's Speech, printed for
 Debrett in Piccadilly.

nor had the Nation even the semblance of a *free* Constitution. Nay, such was the horrid extent of Despotic Power, and so numerous were the Persons who had been its Victims, that it was not till several months after the *happy period* you allude to, that the National Assembly could find out the Multitude of Persons arbitrarily imprisoned throughout the Kingdom, or even the *places* of their confinement; nor could this discovery be made, till the National Assembly, on the second of *last* month, voted the following Resolution; videlicet, * that “all
 “ Governors, King’s Lieutenants, Com-
 “ manders of State Prisons, Goalers,
 “ and Superiors of *Religious* Houses, and
 “ all Persons charged with the custody
 “ of Persons imprisoned by *Lettres-de-*

* See page 29 of the No. 165 of the *Procès-Verbal* of the National Assembly, printed by their order.

“ *Cachet*, or by any Order whatsoever
 “ of any of the Agents of the Execu-
 “ tive Power, should make to the Na-
 “ tional Assembly a true Report con-
 “ taining the Names, Surnames, and
 “ ages of the different Persons in their
 “ custody, together with the causes and
 “ the date of their detention, and an
 “ Extract of the respective Orders by
 “ virtue of which they were kept in
 “ confinement.” Such were the blessed
 effects of that *good Constitution*, of which,
 you say, the French were at that time in
absolute possession.—At the time when that
good Constitution existed, Public Offices
 were sold, and Judges were privately
solicited to distribute Public Justice to
 Individuals. The common People were
 borne down by oppressive Services, and
 by unequal and galling Taxes, from
 which the opulent were free. Feudal
 Tyranny

Tyranny existed, and the abject state of Vassalage existed also. A Nest of Government Spies swarmed throughout the Country; and in *Paris*, they were stationed even in *private* Houses. The People saw their Fellow Citizens (and often their *best* Fellow Citizens) thrown into *Dungeons*, and kept in Chains, detained for years in those solitary and dark Cells of Despotism, without any public accusation, without the possibility of obtaining any Trial, or of procuring any redress, and even without being informed of the supposed offences of which they were basely and secretly accused, or of the names of their accusers. This was their *good* Constitution!—But, *excellent* as it was, the People could no longer bear it.

In addition to all this, the Nation, afterwards, saw their Capital surrounded
by

by *foreign mercenaries*, joined to their standing Army, who had been ordered thither, to over-awe the National Assembly, and to intimidate the People. And I know, for certain, from those who were at *Paris* at the time, that the Citizens universally expected, that, that Metropolis was to be attacked by the Soldiery, in the *dead of night*.

The People, moreover, from the great scarcity of corn, were then *literally starving* for want of bread: and *that*, at a time when that horrid scarcity was supposed (and perhaps not without just cause) to be, in great measure, *artificial*. Was it to be supposed that, under *such* circumstances, an oppressed, a threatened, and a famished People would proceed upon abstract Ideas of Metaphysics, or would even act, in all respects, with that perfect temper and moderation
which,

which, under *other* circumstances, they might have done? Any Man who could expect this, must know but *little* of human nature!

France contains between five and six times as many Inhabitants as England and Wales together. They are spread over an immense Kingdom, and in some parts of the Country their Poverty is excessive. That Poverty has been produced by their former detestable and arbitrary Government, and by their mad Wars, occasioned, not by the wishes of the People, but, by bad Administrations in that Country. Penury and Distress must ever create discontent, and the excess of misery will originate despair.—To speak, then, dispassionately and fairly upon the subject; whatever may have been, in particular places, the effects of popular desperation, those

Events

Events are NOT to be attributed to the form of their *new* Constitution, which did not even, at that time, exist; but, they are to be ascribed solely to their *old* wretched and execrable Government, which had been, for ages, the cause of the People's oppression, of their indigence, misery, and consequent despair. It was that execrable and wicked Government that provoked the violent insurrections that have happened in France. To that wicked Government, therefore, is to be ascribed all those misfortunes to individuals, which the Friends of humanity will lament. Those insurrections and misfortunes (considering their *cause*) are themselves the strongest proofs of the necessity that there was, for the People to throw off their yoke, and effectually to break asunder the Chains of Tyranny.

The

The change of Government in France, when completed, is likely to be the source of happiness to that kingdom : and, inasmuch as it is an unparalleled example of public Spirit to other enslaved Nations upon the Continent, it is likely to be the source of happiness to Europe. The Revolution Society in London have therefore, with an heartfelt satisfaction, *rejoiced* at this great event ; although Mr. *Burke* pours forth, on the occasion, Lamentations as bitter as those of *Jeremiah* !

The Revolution Society had additional reasons for the pleasure that they expressed. We considered that what had happened in France held out a fair prospect of the continuance of *peace* between the two Nations : and every observant Person must have perceived how much this Country was sinking at the time of

the accursed American War, and also how rapidly it has been rising since. It is to the timely *making of the peace*, more than any other cause, or united causes, that our *present* prosperity is to be ascribed. Was it then unnatural that Englishmen who have been Witnesses of these good effects of peace, should wish for its continuance?

France has, hitherto, been considered by the People of England, as a restless and perfidious neighbour. Not because individuals in France are more treacherously inclined than individuals in this Country: but, because a Government *constituted* as theirs *was*, could never be relied on longer than from day to day. When that Country, as in the two former Reigns, was governed one hour by a Mistress, and the next by any artful Sycophant at Court, their Administration could be but capricious.

capricious. It appeared treacherous, because it was versatile ; and it was versatile, because it was guided by Intrigue. An absolute Government is generally proud, captious, and quarrelsome. A despotic Minister is generally ambitious. Consequently, we cannot wonder at the former empty projects of ambition of the Court of France.

Whereas, since the Revolution, in that Kingdom, there is far less danger of their making Wars from motives of ambition. It is not for the Interest of the *People of France* to go to War with Great Britain, any more than it is for the Interest of the *People* of this Country to go to War with them. It is, therefore, to be expected, that under their *new* form of Government, in which the *People* have so much weight, the Representatives of that people will neither dare, nor be inclined, to

adopt a System of Politics that would be evidently contrary to the Interests of the majority of that Nation, and contrary, as we have reason to believe, to their wishes also.

Have you forgot the Votes of the National Assembly respecting their not making Wars of ambition? Have you never read the Letter which the *Archbishop of Aix*, President of the National Assembly, wrote, by order of that Body, to the Chairman of the Revolution Society in London? The Archbishop expresses himself in the following manner.

“ The Nation appeared to be carried,
 “ as by an universal impulse, to those
 “ changes which now constitute its
 “ strength and its stability.

“ A King whom we may call the *best*
 “ of Men, and the *first* of Citizens, en-
 “ couraged by his virtues the wishes of
 “ the

“ the Nation ; and now, by universal
 “ concurrence, a durable Constitution is
 “ established, founded on the unalien-
 “ able rights of Men and Citizens.

“ It undoubtedly belongs to our age,
 “ in which reason and liberty are ex-
 “ tending themselves together, to extin-
 “ guish, for ever, national hatred and
 “ rivalry.

“ We must not allow prejudices,
 “ which disgrace Nations, to produce
 “ Wars, those *errors* of Governments.
 “ But, the two most enlightened Na-
 “ tions of Europe ought to shew, by
 “ their example, that the love of one’s
 “ Country is not inconsistent with sen-
 “ timents of humanity.

“ The National Assembly discovers,
 “ in the Address of the Revolution So-
 “ ciety of England, *those Principles of*
 “ *universal benevolence which ought to*
 “ *bind*

“ bind together, in all the Countries of the
 “ World, the true Friends to the happi-
 “ ness and liberty of Mankind.”

The desire of cultivating a friendly understanding with Great Britain, has lately manifested itself in many parts of that Kingdom. They consider the People of England, as Men who profess the *same political Truths* with themselves; and who, in the last Century, set them the *glorious Example* which *they* follow at present. I trust that this favourable disposition of the Patriots in France towards this Country, will not be in the least altered, by any of the declamatory Speeches you may ever make, or by all the speculative Pamphlets you can ever publish.

Mr. *Fox* and Mr. *Sheridan*, to their immortal honour, have openly differed with you upon this subject. And it is, Sir, considered by the Public, as a strange
whim,

whim, that a Man should pick a Quarrel with a Friend, *because* he happens to differ from him about the internal politics of a *foreign* Nation : but, it is considered as being more than a whim, when that Friend is *such* a man as Mr. *Sheridan*, whose splendid Abilities are universally acknowledged, whose keen and brilliant Wit is only to be excelled by his natural good humour, and whose liberal principles are not less conspicuous, than his manliness, activity, and resolution. One should have thought, that such qualities, even in a Stranger, might have inspired some respect.

After having attacked your Friends, you might naturally be expected to direct your Shafts also, against those who have not aspired to that distinction; and you appear to deem the Revolution Society in London a proper object. No wonder

wonder that you should resign your pretensions to what you have sarcastically called *the applause of Clubs*. From your disrelish of popular Meetings, it may be supposed that you have not entirely forgotten your expulsion from *Bristol*, or the reception you met with at the *Buckinghamshire* County Meeting.

In your speech, you allude to certain “ *wicked persons* * ” (to use your own elegant expression) “ who have shewn,” you say, “ a strong disposition to imitate the French Spirit of reform ;” but, who the persons are, who are glanced at, by this *dark* intimation, it is difficult to determine. But, from the title of another Pamphlet, which an Advertisement in the Papers has announced is speedily to be expected *from you*, it is

* See page 15 of Mr. Burke’s Speech.

conjectured,

conjectured, that the Revolution Society in London was in your contemplation when you made that Speech. Let the Public judge, from the following words of their Resolution, whether that Society have been blameable, or praise-worthy.

“ At the Anniversary meeting of the
 “ Society for commemorating the glori-
 “ ous Revolution of 1688, held at the
 “ London Tavern on the 4th of Novem-
 “ ber 1789, Dr. Price, moved the fol-
 “ lowing Resolution which passed una-
 “ nimously, and it was also resolved that
 “ the same be transmitted to the National
 “ Assembly of France, signed by the
 “ Chairman :

“ The Society for commemorating the
 “ Revolution in Great Britain, disdain-
 “ ing National Partialities, and rejoicing
 “ at every triumph of Liberty and Jus-
 “ tice over Arbitrary Power, offer to the

“ National Assembly of France, their
 “ congratulations on the Revolution in
 “ that Country, and on the prospect it
 “ gives to the two first Kingdoms in the
 “ World, of a common participation
 “ in the blessings of civil and religious
 “ Liberty.

“ They cannot help adding their
 “ ardent wishes of an happy Settlement
 “ of so important a Revolution, and
 “ at the same time expressing the par-
 “ ticular satisfaction, with which they
 “ reflect on the tendency of the glorious
 “ Example given in France to encou-
 “ rage other Nations to assert the un-
 “ alienable Rights of Mankind, and
 “ thereby to introduce a General Re-
 “ formation in the Governments of
 “ Europe, and to make the World free
 “ and happy.”

This was that *abominable* Resolution,
 which

which those “*wicked Persons*” voted, and which, as their Chairman for the day, I had the *honour* to sign.

It is, however, only matter of conjecture who the “*wicked Persons*” were, to whom you have alluded. *If* to the Members of the Revolution Society, it is fit, Sir, that you should learn, that they are Men who are Friends to Liberty, and that they are, *therefore*, firm Friends to our *free* and excellent Constitution. They meet to commemorate the passing of the *Bill of Rights*, and the glorious *Revolution* of the last Century, the true Principles of which they will ever be ready to defend. They know that the Rights of the illustrious Family upon the Throne, are founded upon those sacred Principles; and (independently of Personal respect for the Princes of that House) every

Whig feels a warm constitutional attachment to that Family, because *their Rights* depend upon the *People's Rights*, which they were brought to this Country to maintain. Nor has the Revolution Society ever shewn itself deficient in the respect due to his Majesty himself. No Member of the Revolution Society was ever heard to say, that “ the King had been *hurled* by Providence from his Throne,” because our gracious Sovereign had the misfortune to labour, for a time, under bodily infirmity.

You blame the French for having gone too far in the alterations they have made in their Constitution; and you accompany this opinion with a string of abusive epithets * too impassioned to be worth

* “ An irrational, unprincipled, proscribing, confiscating, plundering, ferocious, bloody, and tyrannical

worth repeating. Whether the French have gone too far or not, in their constitutional alterations, can be known *only* by those who have been Eye-witnesses of the whole of the transaction, who have been fully informed of the motives that actuated the Leaders of the National Assembly, and who have had accurate information respecting the Opinions of the People of that country relative to the form of Government to be established. Therefore, upon those topics, the Revolution Society has pronounced *nothing*. But, as *Whigs*, they exulted over the demolition of the Bastile, and over the still more important downfall of systematic Tyranny. That Revolution has given a wholesome lesson to *Tories*, and a salutary lesson to *Tyrants*, in all the de-

“ nical democracy.” See page 12 of Mr. Burke’s Speech.

spotic

spotic Countries upon earth, by teaching them, that Men, by becoming *Soldiers* cease not to be *Citizens*; and that no *length* of oppression can ever eradicate from the human heart, the warm feelings of human nature, or the immutable Principles of natural Justice.

All warrantable political Power is derived, either mediately, or immediately, from the *People*. All political Authority is a TRUST; and every wilful act of abuse of that Authority, is a *Breach of Trust*. The natural RIGHTS of the PEOPLE are sacred and *unalienable*.—*Rights*, of which Despotism may rob them for a time, but, which it is not in the Power of Tyranny to *annihilate*. We, therefore, commemorate with rapture, the glorious *Æra*, when the *Army of England* nobly refused to overturn our *free Constitution*, and had the virtue to join
the

the Standard of King William. And we exult (with Mr. Fox) that the *Army of France*, last year, followed that glorious Example, by refusing to become the Instruments of the servitude of their Fellow Citizens.

You talk of “*Democracy**,” and of a “*Mob of Democracies.*” You reproach the National Assembly with having made and recorded, what you are pleased to call, “a sort of Institute and *Digest of* “*Anarchy†*, called the Rights of Man, “in such a pedantic abuse of Elementary “Principles as would have disgraced “Boys at School.” You stile it also a “*mad Declaration.*”

In this “*Digest of Anarchy*” (as you term it) are contained the fundamental Principles of a *free* Government, and the

* See page 20 of Mr. Burke's Speech.

† See page 19 of Mr. Burke's Speech.

noblest assertions of the Rights of Men and Citizens. I have read that Declaration* of the National Assembly often, but never without peculiar satisfaction, because that excellent *Declaration* is superior, in some respects, even to our admirable *Bill of Rights*.

Such, Sir, being your Sentiments respecting *civil Liberty*, I will leave them with the Public, and consider what you advance upon the subject of *Religion*, which is (if possible) still more astonishing.

Speaking of the French, you say †, “ On the side of Religion, the danger “ of their Example is no longer from

* Those Englishmen, who do not understand the French Language, will find a Translation of the above-mentioned French Declaration of Rights, in the Appendix to the Discourse on the Love of our Country, by the Rev. Dr. Richard Price, printed for T. Cadell in the Strand.

† See page 12 of Mr. Burke's Speech.

“ *Intolerance,*

“ *Intolerance*, but from *Atheism*.” I know not what you have discovered in the Votes of the National Assembly, that can warrant you in advancing such an Opinion. Is it true that, in their Journal, of the twenty-fourth day of December last, I find the two following incomparable Resolutions; videlicet*,

“ The National Assembly Decrees, 1st,
 “ That *Non-Catholics* who shall have
 “ fulfilled all the Conditions required,
 “ by its preceding Decrees, in order to
 “ elect, and to be eligible, shall be

* See page 12, of No. 159, of the *Procès-Verbal* of the National Assembly, printed by their order.

“ L’Assemblée Nationale décrète, 1^o. que les Non-Catholiques, qui auront d’ailleurs rempli toutes les Conditions prescrites dans ses précédens Décrets pour être Electeurs et éligibles, pourront être élus dans toutes les degrés d’Administration, sans exception.

“ 2^o. Que les Non-Catholiques sont capables de tous les emplois Civils & Militaires, comme les autres Citoyens.

E

“ capable

“ capable of being elected into all political situations in the State, without exception.

“ 2dly, That *Non-Catholics* be capable of holding all Employments Civil and Military, like other Citizens.”

By these just, and politic Resolutions, the National Assembly have admitted *Protestants*, and other Classes of *Dissenters*, into all Offices and Situations that are capable of being held by the Members of the Established Church. They have thereby *united* and *consolidated* their Citizens, and set an example of Wisdom and Liberality, worthy of the imitation of *all their Neighbours*. Is this, Sir, what you call *Atheism*? If so, *Atheism* has got strong footing in Scotland, where *the Test, and Corporation Acts* do not exist: and *Atheism* has struck deep root in Ireland also; for, in Ireland that
unwise,

unwise, unreasonable, and unjust Law, the *Test Act*, has been repealed.

In France, they have abolished *Tythes*: and so the Parliament ought to do in England, by substituting another mode of providing for the Clergy, less vexatious, less detrimental to Agriculture, more convenient for the Clergy, and less injurious to the Cause of Religion.

In France they have lately abolished Monasteries: in England we did so, long ago.

In France the National Assembly has diminished the unreasonable Revenues of the superior Clergy, and those also of the *Drones* of the established Church, at the same time that it has increased the hard-earned Stipends of the laborious and inferior Clergy; and (if the information I have received be correct) above FIVE parts, out of SIX, of the *whole*

Clergy of the established Church in France, have been GAINERS by the late Revolution. Is this what you call *Atheism*? It is what I call an Act of *Justice*, as well as a *fine stroke of Policy*.

Despotism in France, induced the Friends of Civil Liberty there, to espouse the Cause of the *inferior Clergy*, whose just pretensions to encouragement might otherwise have been forgotten.—Should a Spirit of *religious Persecution* ever go forth in England, it may possibly induce the uniting Friends of *religious Freedom* to espouse the Cause of the *inferior Clergy* in this kingdom. For, that useful, laborious, and respectable part of the Clergy of the established Church, have, in my opinion, heavy Grievances to complain of: and better were it to redress those Grievances, because it is *just* to do so; than, by a *System of Intolerance*

lerance of any kind, to awaken the minds of men, by *stimulating* discussion upon *that* subject.

All Sects in this Country contribute their proportion, to the support of the established Church. Therefore, all Sectaries have as good a right as we have, to offer an Opinion respecting the distribution of their own Property.

You talk, Sir, in your Speech *, of the “ Estates, of the *Splendor*, and of “ the Orders and Gradations, and also “ of the *Majesty of the Church*.” I have heard of the *Majesty of Kings*, I have heard of the MAJESTY of the PEOPLE, I have heard of the spirit of *humility* of the Christian Religion, and of its Apostles ; but, this is the *first* time I ever heard the expression of the “ *Majesty of the CHURCH!*”

* See page 29 of Mr. Burke's Speech.

The Revolution in France is one of the most striking and memorable pages in History ; and no political event was, perhaps, ever more pregnant with good consequences to future ages. That great and glorious Revolution will, in time, disseminate throughout Europe, liberality of sentiment, and a just regard for Political, Civil, and Religious Liberty. It will, in all probability, make the World, for Centuries, prosperous, free, and happy, when the Author of the *Sublime and Beautiful* shall be no more, and the WHIG Principles from *St. Omers** be forgotten.

I have the Honour to be,

S I R,

Your most obedient,

And most humble Servant,

STANHOPE.

* Note ; by the *Principles from St. Omers* is here meant those justly exploded Principles *technically* so called, and not any which may be held *there*, at present.